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Cattlemen's group looks for ways to beef up growing industry



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The Courier-Journal

Capitalizing on improved foraging techniques and taking advantage of state incentives to replace tobacco farming could take the cattle industry to the next level, members of the Kentucky Cattlemen's Association were told during their annual convention in Bowling Green.

Nearly 1,000 cattle producers attended the conference Friday and Saturday to discuss such topics as genetic research and environmental issues. While many positive developments were pointed out, the producers were told that more needs to be done to keep the industry growing and to boost its presence in Kentucky.

The state is home to 1.2 million beef cows, according to Dave Maples, the association's executive vice president. The state ranks eighth nationally in that category and first among states east of the Mississippi River.

Industry figures indicate that Kentucky's cattle producers must adopt improved foraging techniques and use the state's away-from-tobacco diversification programs to expand the cattle base.

"Kentucky is a great foraging state," said Ed Price, who has about 300 head of cattle on his farm in Auburn. "With a little more management of pasture, better soil testing or fertilizer programs, we could see a 25 to 30 percent increase of the product."

Price said "very few people" are doing proper soil testing in the state. Improved soil testing methods will lead to greater cattle production and an increased demand, he said.

"You move more pounds and you can sell more beef for a better price," he said. "That's just an old economics equation there."

According to Maples, a side benefit to better foraging practices is the environmental impact. Cattle farmers can increase production while preserving the land, he said.

"The technique in raising grass (for forage) is so much better," he said. "With the new fencing systems and water systems, we can do a better job with the environmental issues and keep things greener."

Improved water systems are just one way the state's cattle industry is tapping into Kentucky Agricultural Development Board funds. The board allocated \$157,053 to Scott County Beef



Improvement Association Inc. during a December meeting to implement and administer water enhancement programs in the county.

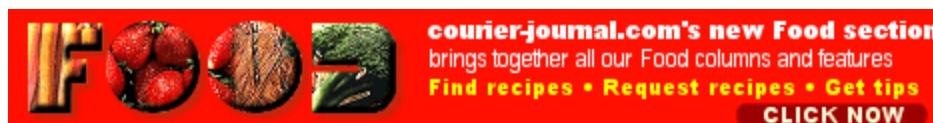
The board also allocated nearly \$275,000 for a series of cattle genetics, cattle handling and forage improvement programs in six Kentucky counties last month. Maples said it made sense for the industry to turn to the board, which is mandated to assist tobacco farmers with farm diversification programs, because many tobacco farmers also raise cattle.

"There's a lot of tobacco money coming into agriculture and the cattle industry can be a main recipient of that," he said.

The cattlemen's association announced during the convention that Marion cattle producer Mark Williams will serve as president in 2003. Williams is co-owner and managing partner of the 2,700-acre Triple W Farms and has been a member of the group's board since 1996.

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